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ABSTRACT

Just prior to the outbreak of World War II, Maria Montessori called attention to the task of educating for peace. This concern for peace intensified in the nuclear decades that followed and formed the basis for the regional seminar held in Boston. At the Boston workshop, the Academy Award winning documentary, "Women for America: For the World" was shown. For some, the message of citizen empowerment was new, and for some, a renewal. Following the film, the group participated in an activity to develop the skill of articulating positions without interruption within the temporal frame of three minutes. This activity is based on the assumption that Montessori-influenced education is, by definition, education for peace, and that it is a social change activity. Participants then engaged in small group discussion which were then reported back to the whole group. Each of the group discussions focused on a different aspect of Montessori-influenced education. (SM)

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PROJECTS FOR PEACE: WE CAN TAKE ACTION

by

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PROJECTS FOR PEACE: WE CAN TAKE ACTION

On November 1st, at the AMS Regional Seminar in Boston, thirty seven Montessorians met in the first workshop sponsored by the AMS Peace Committee. The workshop was called Projects for Peace: We Can Take Action. *It became apparent that many of us have taken action, are taking action and plan to take future action. We believe we are not so much a traditional committee as a prismatic effort which we can enhance by articulation and cooperation. We want to encourage and refine the spontaneous concerns that so many of us have been developing for peace. By her international work, and her speeches to world organizations, Maria Montessori called attention just prior to the outbreak of the second world war to the task of educating for peace. During her confinement in India until that war was ended, Montessori worked with Ghandi's National Freedom Movement and developed her ideas about cosmic education. This concern for peace has intensified in the nuclear decades. We believe that the means we use for helping children to be peacemakers are as important as the end that we seek.*

At the Boston workshop, the Academy Award Winning Documentary "WOMEN FOR AMERICA; FOR THE WORLD" was shown as interested participants gathered. For some the message of citizen empowerment was new and for some a renewal. A variety of statements by American women leaders express in different ways the urgency of helping our planet surive for the sake of the next generation, -for all our children all the world over. This affirmed us and helped us remember why we must work together on our common ground and also as individuals breaking new ground.

During the second half hour of the workshop we used a process, a learning task, which might be called or "Friendly Listening." This is a grace and courtesy exercise drawn from the grassroots training efforts of the peace movement, particularly mediation training and peer counseling. The facilitator presents it, keeps time and then asks for discussion on the process. The purpose of Friendly Listening is to work in pairs to practice the skill of speaking our piece concisely (in three minutes,) but without interruption. The listener practices giving their full attention for the three minutes, avoiding advice giving, rebuttal, praise or personal associations. At the end of three minutes the listener practices the skill of restating the facts and feelings of the speaker's position clearly (in one minute). Then the speaker practices the skill of clarifying and extending the listener's recall and response (in one half minute.) Following this pattern, the speaker and listener reverse roles. Thus each partner in the pair has an opportunity to express their own experience and to be nourished by another's experience on the same subject. Then they are given about five minutes to converse freely.

On this occasion each partner was asked to affirm one way in which they were now educating for peace and to share a difficulty they were experiencing with that. In this we assumed that Montessori influenced education is by definition education for peace and that it is a social change activity. The participants were given a time of silent reflection in which to identify their concern so that they could listen and speak with better concentration. Then, in turn, they had an opportunity to speak without interruption, to listen while their partner restated the facts and feelings they had heard, and to clarify or extend in response. During the conversation that followed they were asked to develop, if they could, a next step each could take towards coping with their particular difficulty.

Reactions to this exercise were varied:

"I think this process is very respectful. I found that it was very easy to open up to someone who is willing to listen and then, experiencing that respect from another person made it even more valuable for me to sit and listen to their story. It was wonderful."

"Knowing that you were going to be listened to made it easier to be quieter when you were listening."

"At first I was reluctant and then as she was talking, I was getting inspired by what she was doing and then I was inspired by what I was doing myself and it was a great experience for me."

"Ordinary things that we are doing are important and we forget to affirm that."

"It demonstrates an important part of the the peace process. We need to communicate one to one and have the clarification that what you thought you said is really what you said and that it is the same as what someone heard."

We all need spiritual friends along this journey, even if it is a stranger on the train or at a conference."

"I found out I'm more involved with peace than I thought I was."

"It is very difficult to listen. It is difficult not to speak for three minutes because somebody says something that makes you want to say something, not even a rebuttal but a contribution."

"How did it feel to talk for three minutes with no one interrupting you.?"
" Laughter"

"I'm impressed with the different avenues in which this process can be used. Between family members, in staff meetings, with the children. The power and the experience of two children listening in this way seems to me to have enormous potential - and like the silence game - it could be contagious."

It doesn't tend to work in families without a facilitator. The structure gives permission and the timing gives a discipline. It can be integrated into experienced peer counseling.

"It made me realize how disrespectful we often are, just ordinarily. You know how someone will be talking and you just sort of jump in to say something instead of really listening to the person. It was helpful to me, I think I do that. We all can own that."

"I'm using the skill of restating all the time with my children in the classroom without realizing that it is something I <u>should</u> be doing. I tell them I only want to hear my voice when I'm presenting something and I would like them to restate what I say and if they can't, they know they were disrespectful to me or to other children in the classroom."

"The expectation that you are going to be restating what someone says helps you listen more carefully."

The second half of this workshop was spent with participants in discussion in small groups and in their reports back to the whole. The hotel provided eight diningroom tables for this purpose with facilitators present at each table to help focus dicussion on a particular concerns. One table was a literature display organized by Linda Seeley. Afterwards, the groups gave two minute summaries of the essence of their discussion. This section, as well as the film dialogue, is available on the tape recording made of the workshop at the conference. We announced that a summary of the whole would be submitted to <u>*The Constructive Triangle.*</u>

The first table, "Developing an AMS Video/Slide show: Educating Children to be Peacemakers" was facilitated by Marie Dugan, director of the Wilmington Montessori School and a former AMS Board President. How our Montessori programs in fact are helping children to be peacemakers could be shown in an inexpensive film for parents and caregivers. Those at the table agreed to go back to their schools and talk with others and develop contacts and ideas and send them in to Kay who will summarize the ideas for content and process.

The second table, "Helping to Equip a Montessori School in Central America" was facilitated by Gus Cadieux, administrator of the Blossom Montessori School in Delmar, New York, near Albany. He says,

"When Noreen and I began thinking about our Montessori school we dreamed of opening it to some lower income children. But the circumstances leading up to the acquisition of a permanent home for Blossoms Montessori precluded that possibility. Because we were so far from the inner city, those children would not be able to get here. We will continue to seek out some way to do that nevertheless.

"About that time Quest for Peace began to send not only medical supplies to Nicaraguans but educational materials as well. That gave us the idea.

"We had lived in Honduras for three years, 1974-77, and worked with the destitute there. We could be of help. We wrote it into our by-laws that a set percentage of at least ten percent of the gross income would be set aside for educational assistance to Central America.

"We inquired at the Comite Hispano Montessori and Marjorie Farmer gave us the names of two Montessorians in Nicaragua: Maria Torres and Candida Cordero, who were trained in 1981 in the Comite Montessori Espanol's training program. And this past April I went to Honduras and Nicaragua to see how we could be of help. Montessorians who can help with the Nicaraguan project can send Montessori materials for the demonstration school in Diriamba where Maria Torres teaches and for Candida Cordero's work in Managua as Director of Bienestar de la Ninez, sponsored by CEPAD. This is a protestant ecumenical development agency that offers technical, logistical and material aid and training seminars to sixty preschools, forty percent of which are in rural areas. They also need other basic school materials. Funds are needed to provide scholarships for Montessori training for three more Nicaraguan teachers in Mexico or Costa Rica. Send contributions to Friends of Latin American (a tax deductible organization) c/o Blossom Montessori School, 56 Hudson Avenue, Delmar, New York 12054.

This table urged more US Montessori schools twinning with a Montessori school in another country. One participant said the children in their US school knew the children in the twinned school, unlike themselves, were experiencing destitution and war but were astonished that just like themselves, they wanted magic markers to draw with. For Latin American schools, contact Comite Montessori Espanol 2127 S. 35 Ave., Omaha, Nebraska 68105. (tel. 402 345 8810)

Another table, "Beginning a Peace Curriculum in your Classroom - Beginning a Peace Center in Your Community," was facilitated by Linda Seeley, of Harborlight Montessori School, member of the faculty of Northeast Montessori Institute and an active member of Educators for Social Responsibility. In the short time for discussion, many activities now being tried were identified. Make a thousand paper cranes and send them to a school in Japan. Talk about peaceful and warlike actions and chart them. Have a pen pal in another school in another country. Adopt a child for the school to care for. Plan parent education and involvement in the peace education process. One participant, an intern, plans a yearlong project around feeding each other in the classroom, feeding people in the community, and feeding the animals in the area with food left over from snack, rather than throwing it away. In one school they think about absent members and send them letters and include community and family members in this. Valentine Vision, Catherine if you write to her she will set you up with a contact with a hospital or school in another country. Establish peace making in the classroom and use the languague of negotiation and mediation. Be specific about peace education in the context of cultural studies and in cosmic education. Join Educators for Social Responsibility and adapt ideas from their peace curriculum. Imitate the school in Boston which has a peace center - weekly meetings of teachers in the area interested in peace education are held at their school to share ideas and problem solve. Give one hour a week to write a legislator, or to help the homeless.

Cathy Beemer, of the Montessori Day School in Chapel Hill North Carolina facilitated a discussion on "Teaching About the Soviet Union At the Elementary Level. Cathy is a board member of the North Carolina Center for Peace Education and an active member of Educators for Social Responsibility. Both groups are sponsoring a conference December 5 called "Insuring the Future; Educating for Social Responsibility" This group began by identifying what they liked about the Soviet Union and what they had difficulty with. They suggested.first finding out what children know, and then teaching about the people and the culture. Bridges for Peace brings Soviet visitors to this country. Students from this country have gone to the Soviet Union as ambassadors. These people could be invited to speak in your class. You can find out about the student ambassadors in your area by contacting your Governor's office. Forty-four states have participated in the program and senthighschool students, seventeen year olds, to live for four weeks with Soviet people this past summer as student ambassadors. Their obligation is to be available to talk to community people about their experience as a form of leadership training. Beyond War has made bridges between the Soviet Union and the United States in several ways, one of which was a simultaneous telecast in which children from both nations were able to sing together the same song in harmony and in both languages.

Dorothy Feldman, Chair of the AMS Teacher Training Committee and an AMS Board Member is Visiting Teacher to Public Montessori Schools in Columbus, Ohio. Her table considered Letterwriting for Peace. Dotty is willing to coordinate anetwork to collect letters from Montessori teachers, parents and students to legislators and disseminate them as a package in support of legislation on behalf of the child and for peace. Please send her a copy of the letters you write on issues you believe crucial to peace education, defined in whatever way that is important to you, whether the letters reflect issues at the state or federal level. One suggestion was to collect letters urging federally supported child care facilities and send it to Dotty Feldman by the New Year.

Another suggestion arose from a comment by Aileen Godat of Children's House of Park Slope, Brooklyn who called me following the workshop. She believes that one of the reasons for the fascination with superheros, especially the anxious and compulsive fascination sometimes observed in young children, is that they feel unempowered. One of the goals of the Montessorian is to empower children. Out of this ccme a desire of some of us to focus on the issue of war toys each Thnaksgiving, just prior to the gift giving season. Providing information on alternative constructive toys might be a useful task for schools. Material on this campaign is available from the War Resisters League. Perhaps we could follow the example of Finland which last January outlawed the manufacture, sale and import of war toys with particular emphasis on those that copy modern weapons. Letters on this issue would be welcome, whether to legislators or to companies. Other ideas for letter writing for children included Valentines for Peace to school children in other countries, thank you letters at Thanksgiving to friends and families and public persons for particular peace efforts and materials for designing a peace postcard in the art area of the classroom.

Nancy Rose, Co-director of New England Early Childhood Associates, and Educational Coordinator of Pathways for Children led discussion on "Joining in a National AMS Peace Effort; Departures and Beginnings: Where Do We Go From Here?" Marlene Baron, the President of AMS represents AMS which has NGO status at the United Nations. We would like to hear from her in the Constructive Triangle and other ways. We hope the AMS board will allocate funds for this responsibility so that the four required meetings each year can be well attended and reported. We began a discussion of the responsibility of teacher training programs towards peace education.

The reports concluded with a presentation from the table led by Noreen Cadieux whose children at Blossom Montessori School had sent her to us to teach us the prayer they say everyday in school, a prayer learned from the grandnephew of Mahatma Ghandi: This prayer for Universal Peace is accompanied by a graceful sign language.

I offer you peace.
I offer you love
I offer you friendship.
I hear your cry.
I see your beauty.
I feel your pain.
My wisdom flows from a higher source.
I salute that source in you.
Let us work together.